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TO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1836
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 7762
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1934
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2200
INFO RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFIS/LCC SEOUL SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHJMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//OSD/ISA/EAP// PRIORITY
RHMFIS/COMUSKOREA J2 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFIS/COMUSKOREA J3 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFIS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 000022

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LCC SEOUL SEOUL KOREA PLEASE PASS TO J2, J5 AND SCJS

E.O. 12958: DECL: AFTER KOREAN REUNIFICATION

TAGS: PARM PREL MARR MNUC KS KN

SUBJECT: ROK DEFENSE WHITE PAPER LABELS DPRK A 'SERIOUS THREAT'

Classified By: A/DCM Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary. The Ministry of National Defense (MND) released its biennial Defense White Paper on December 29. The White Paper upgraded its characterization of the DPRK from a "direct military threat" to a "serious threat" to national security. The White Paper's focus remains on the threat posed by North Korea's conventional capability, WMD development, and frontline deployment of military power, but highlights the DPRK's nuclear test in October 2006 and its nuclear capabilities as a new, more serious, factor. The Paper also addresses for the first time OPCON transfer, the 2020 Defense Reform Plan, and USFK base relocation. The White Paper notes that the Yongsan Relocation Program will proceed with the "end of 2008 as a target," despite recent reports that the schedule will be delayed five years to 2013.

While the 2006 White Paper falls short of pre-2004 White Paper characterizations of the DRPK as a "main enemy," its assessment of the North's threat, particularly in light of the October 2006 nuclear test, seems to be more in line with reality. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On December 29, MND released its biennial Defense White Paper. The previous White Paper published in 2004 characterized the DPRK as a "direct military threat" based on its conventional capabilities, WMD, and redeployment of military power. The new White Paper continues to highlight these same factors in its assessment. In particular, the White Paper focuses on North Korea's frontline deployment of forces, including 200 new artillery units, 40 percent of its 820 air fighters, and 60 percent of its 420 vessels and 60 submarines.

¶3. (U) The most significant change from the 2004 Defense White Paper is in its assessment of the North Korean nuclear capability following the October 2006 nuclear test. The statement in previous White Papers that "there is no solid evidence that North Korea possesses nuclear weapons" was deleted in the 2006 White Paper, but the Paper falls short of declaring the DPRK a nuclear power. The White Paper estimates that the DPRK may have extracted over 30 kilograms of additional plutonium, but does not speculate on the manufacture of additional nuclear devices beyond the "1 to 2" possible devices indicated in the 2004 White Paper. Upon the

release of the 2006 White Paper, MND Policy Planning Chief Major General Chung Seung-jo emphasized that the ROKG position remains to "not acknowledge North Korea as a nuclear power."

¶4. (U) The 2006 White Paper included background information on OPCON transfer for the first time, stating that "the United States and ROK agreed to transfer OPCON between October 15, 2009 and March 15, 2012." The White Paper outlines the 2020 Defense Reform Plan and Defense Reform Act, which was just passed by the National Assembly in December. The White Paper also states that the USFK's relocation from Yongsan to Pyeongtaek will be carried out with the "end of 2008 as a target." In his comments, Major General Chung said that 2008 had always been the target completion date, but that resistance by residents of Pyeongtaek was to blame for the delay.

¶5. (C) Comment. The previous Defense White Paper released in 2004 gained notoriety for removing the designation of North Korea as a "main enemy." This newest White Paper is similarly restrained in its characterization of the North as a "serious threat." However, by highlighting the nuclear test, it addresses the threat in a somewhat more realistic manner. MND also appears to be backing up its words regarding this threat with concrete steps as evidenced by the FY 2007 budget approval for 'bunker buster' bombs and ballistic-missile early warning system components worth Won 39.2 billion (USD 42.2 million). End Comment.

STANTON